

Providing the Sources for Research

Many librarians will concur with the statement that "the progress of social intelligence depends on the energy and vision of librarians." This is one of the reasons why libraries exist. But comparatively few of these "prepare the sources for future historical and scientific understanding of the ever-expanding present." The task of providing the sources for research into the social inheritance and into the processes of social growth has been assumed to require resources of personnel and equipment not commonly found in community libraries. Now Dr. Lasswell suggests that in a quite different way many libraries can and probably should participate in the gathering of resources being illuminated by the new scientific study of communication.

Two roles not entirely separable emerge from this picture—the librarian as preserver of many media of communication (those normally acquired and those more recently developed) and the librarian as one of the community's recorders of the things which come to the attention of community groups selected for observation. Both of these roles in their fuller sense are new to most librarians. They have not been tested for their practicality or validity, although the time is obviously near when this should be done. Librarians who are equipped to deal only with the printed word are not likely to meet the needs of the new world a'coming. The question is largely how far shall which libraries go, in what direction, and to what purpose.

Dr. Lasswell makes it clear that social and political scientists of the future will want to tap many vats of material in their research into the processes of social growth which hitherto have been by-passed through ignorance and unavailability. One of the first questions librarians should ask is how far are, or should, these records be preserved by their producers? Data on this will help the librarian to keep his vision fixed on his special responsibilities and his energy stretched to cover them all in an adequate way. If selection of resources must be made it should be

on the basis of a clear definition of functions and a hardheaded look at what will be involved.

Have librarians the vision called for to make a wise decision? Vision in this instance infers insight and discernment which goes beyond present horizons and which is built upon education and experience. Formal education for librarians in the art of gathering and preserving source materials now being made useful for the first time by the development of new scientific tools is only beginning. Even today the professional library schools offer those in the field little aid, for they lack the laboratories in which to test their theories. Discussion in print also needs the tether of experience to make it realistic. The profession and the library schools need the benefit of experiments which can be carried on only by libraries which have the financial, physical, and personnel equipment to give the idea a fair trial. Once the limits of library participation are clear, the education of both librarians and library trustees can proceed in a lucid manner. The best that any librarian can do, in the absence of education, experimentation, and experience in this particular field, is to hazard a guess at what might be done in the meantime.

It is clear that social scientists should take the leadership in working out with community agents and interested individuals a nationwide plan for channeling the resources revealed by the developing science of communication. A clear statement of methods and goals should be prepared. If libraries equipped with the tools for preserving and translating the collected records appear to be the best depositories, ways should be found for giving them additional financial support. Personnel trained for this special undertaking would be scarce, but some librarians would welcome an opportunity for participation in well-formulated plans for the gathering of local sources and for the scientific study of communication. Freed from some of the pressure of other manifold duties, some of these might also take the initiative in leading community interest in the enterprise.